

[Review] Peter Squires and John Lea, ed. (2012)
Criminalisation and advanced marginality: critically exploring
the work of Loïc Wacquant

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Peter Squires and John Lea (Eds), *Criminalisation and Advanced Marginality: Critically Exploring the Work of Loïc Wacquant*, The Policy Press, Bristol, 2012, 272 pp, £70
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In this edited collection Peter Squires and John Lea assemble a series of papers which originally formed part of the Symposium on Advanced Marginality that took place in 2009 at the University of Brighton. The book uses a number of themes to develop Wacquant's best known work on theories of marginality, paying greatest attention to his most famous works, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (2007) and *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (2009).

While it is clear that the contributors to this book are broadly persuaded by Wacquant's work, the themes used serve to expand the theory of advanced marginality into areas that have been somewhat neglected – including issues of agency, resistance and attempts to re-focus the issues away from the North American penal state. The authors have therefore used a significant range of examples – from Markus-Michael Müller's examination of policing and penology in Latin America to Denise Martin and Paula Wilcox's analysis of women and the UK welfare state – to push the boundaries of Wacquant's work. The contributors do not necessarily disagree with Wacquant's

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interpretation of neo-liberal state-craft as producing a disenfranchised precariat section of society who are, to an extent, at the mercy of state authority. However, the book is successful in highlighting areas such as resistance and agency which require further analysis to understand the relationship between the centaur state which is ‘liberal at the top and paternalistic at the bottom, which presents...a caring visage toward the middle and upper classes, and a fearsome...mug toward the lower class’ (Wacquant, 2010: 217), and the citizens it is said to produce. Lynda Measor’s chapter on cultures of resistance and gender is particularly adept at examining the way in which Wacquant has presented ‘a picture of the “assistential” classes as a deprived people flattened by brutal circumstances that fix them in place. They are a colourless, uniform group’ (2012: 135). Her empirical work serves to highlight the micro-level relationships that enabled ‘welfare mothers’ (Measor, 2012; 143) to mobilise resistance to their ‘othering’ (Measor, 2012: 143). Measor notes how, via small acts of insubordination, the marginalised can begin to speak and to challenge socio-political power.

Measor’s piece also provides an example of what appears to be another theme in this work – the use of empirical work to support Wacquant’s ideas. This enables the contributors to identify tensions and contradictions in neo-liberal penal policy and means that the work is undoubtedly rooted in social science methods of analysis. For example, Lynn Hancock and Gerry Mooney note the ways in which the mass media fetishises the ineffectual precariat as the cause of social breakdown via television programmes such as *The Fairy Jobmother*, while Squires considers the relationship between marginality and geographically located violence. The book is also theoretically informed by, for example, John Rodger’s examination of the de-civilising process through a Wacquant-ian lens and

Müller's examination of the 'particular' and the 'universal'. Thus the book brings together both theoretically and empirically informed work to broaden the understanding of theories of advanced marginality.

This book comes at a time when the credibility of neo-liberalism as an 'ideology' is coming under increasing scrutiny yet, aside from a relatively brief discussion of Peck's (2010) analysis of the practices of the left and right hands of the state (in which the left part of the state believes that the right does not understand and has no real interest in what the left is doing), the concept of neo-liberalism as a distinct political agenda is given relatively little attention. However, at the heart of the work, one gets the sense that the key theme is resistance – of highlighting some of the contradictions brought about by self styled neo-liberal practices which may serve as a basis for testing the 'ideology' as a whole. Personally, Wacquant's analysis of how recent political practices have served to segregate and discipline the precariat class is persuasive. This book demonstrates how that understanding of state agencies' practices beyond penal authorities acts to reinforce the segregation of those who lack social mobility, but also notes pockets of resistance among the segregated groups.

That said, there are, perhaps, greater issues at stake which merit further consideration. The book makes certain assumptions about the very existence of neo-liberalism and the role that the academy has in exposing its practices which ultimately reinforce class based divisions. Bell (2011) notes how Wacquant assumes that punitiveness is inherent in neo-liberalism, while also acknowledging that social welfare expenditure has actually increased alongside spending in relation to criminal justice in recent years. Bourdieu (2001), of whom Wacquant was a student, has noted the role of

the academy in the gradual circulation of neo-liberal ideas via journals, such that those ideas came to be taken for granted, and were taken up by the media in processes that he describes as ‘symbolic inculcation’ (2001: 29). This, in turn, gave neo-liberalism its sense of inevitability. One begins to wonder if, rather than highlighting the effects of so-called neo-liberal policies as happens here, a wholesale review of the very assumptions made about what characterises neo-liberal practice is required. As Bourdieu says:

One of the theoretical and practical errors of many theories...has been failure to take account of the power of theory. We must no longer make that mistake. We are dealing with opponents who are armed with theories, and I think they need to be fought with intellectual and cultural weapons (2001: 53).

Again, however, Bourdieu assumes passivity on the part of those subject to the inevitability of neo-liberal theory and practice. The concern remains however that, by looking to effects rather than deconstructing the theory itself in the way that those such as Peck (2010) and Dean (2009) are doing, attempts are being made to clarify neo-liberalism and thereby inadvertently strengthen its status as an ideology.

There can be no doubt that this book synthesises a range of materials to demonstrate processes of marginalisation that have occurred in a number of settings, and does so in a stimulating, theoretically informed and empirically sound way. Wacquant’s own work is persuasive and the contributions to this volume only add to the ways in which his broad principles can be applied across a number of different social settings. The greatest strength of this book seems, to me, to be that its focus on processes of marginalisation brings issues of class into focus – and thus acts as an example against the

concerns of those such as Sveinsson (2009) that class has become a neglected area of study.

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